

Report to Veterans

Information for South Dakota Veterans

Spring 2000



Call Tom!

Toll-Free:
1-800-424-9094

In Aberdeen:
(605) 225-8823

In Rapid City:
(605) 348-7551

In Sioux Falls:
(605) 334-9596

Daschle: Continuing the Fight

Senator Outlines Work for Veterans

Dear Fellow Veteran:

Last year, I had the opportunity to visit with veterans from all across South Dakota.

Whether I was meeting with veterans in Aberdeen and Lemmon on Memorial Day, or in Pierre and Deadwood during the American Legion and VFW state conventions, one message rang clear: we must improve veterans' health care.



Senator Tom Daschle meets with veterans in Rapid City in June to discuss his emergency care proposal. See page 3 for details.

Let's face it. America's veteran population is getting older. As the health care needs of veterans continue to increase, our commitment to veterans' health care must keep pace. When we are expecting the largest federal budget surplus in our history, it is simply unacceptable for Washington to say we can't afford to meet the health care needs of veterans. We can and we must.

That is why I fought alongside Senators Tim Johnson and Paul Wellstone to add \$3 billion to the amount we will spend on veterans' health care this year. That is why I fought for legislation that will allow veterans to be reimbursed for emergency care they receive at non-VA facilities.

We won some of these battles and lost some. Although I am pleased that my emergency care proposal was recently enacted into law, I am disappointed that we were unable to obtain more funding for veterans' health care.

The bottom line is that much more needs to be done to ensure that veterans who served our country receive the health care and compensation they earned and rightfully deserve. I look forward to working with veterans and veterans service organizations in South Dakota as we continue the fight for America's veterans in the year 2000.

INSIDE:

Health Care:
Daschle Protects Veterans Health
Page 2

Emergency Care:
Daschle Access Plan Passes
Page 3

Tom Can Help!
Have a Question or Problem? How to Contact Tom
Page 4

Daschle Fights for Veterans' Health Care

South Dakota Senator Vows to Fight for Additional Funding

Like most veterans, I was disappointed that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) failed to request adequate resources for veterans' health care in the year 2000.

I feared that the proposed budget would force the VA to make significant reductions in personnel, facilities and the health care services it provides to our nation's veterans. That is why I supported several proposals offered in the Senate last year to increase funding for veterans' health care.



Senator Daschle meets with members of the South Dakota American Legion in March to discuss health care and other veterans issues.

After a long, hard fight, Congress finally increased the proposed budget for veterans' health care by \$1.7 billion dollars.

Although these additional funds will help the VA keep up with the rising cost of health care, much more is needed. That is why I was deeply disappointed that an effort by Senator Johnson to increase funding for veterans' health care by a total of \$3 billion was defeated. Despite this setback, you can be assured that I will continue the fight this year for additional funding for veterans' health care.

A TRIBUTE TO ADMIRAL BUD ZUMWALT

On January 2, the nation lost one of its best, Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt, Jr. I was fortunate enough to work with him on a cause we shared and experience the generosity of spirit that made him so special.

While he never sought power for its own sake, Admiral Zumwalt never shrank from it either. As Chief of Naval Operations and later in his retirement, he recognized power as a valuable tool to serve his country and secure justice for others. And he used that tool, that way, every chance he got.

He used it to build racial and gender equity in the Navy. He used it to increase morale and enhance recruitment. He used it to lead his fellow servicemen in three wars. And he used it to advocate for the thousands of Vietnam veterans exposed to Agent Orange. Bud Zumwalt never turned his back on the men and women with whom he served. He valued every human life and treated every veteran with the respect he knew they deserved. He devoted himself to others until the day he died.

The Admiral's special connection to his son Elmo was well known, and his close connection to his entire family was clear to anyone who knew him. As they face the difficult days ahead, America's thoughts and prayers are with them.

In virtually everything he did, Bud Zumwalt exemplified the best a person can be. As a veteran and an American, I am proud of Admiral Zumwalt's accomplishments in the Navy. I am proud of everything he did to make the military's values reflect the best of America's values. And I am proud to have worked with him to take the initial steps toward justice for the thousands of veterans who, like his own son, lost their health and even their lives because of their exposure to Agent Orange.

Daschle Emergency Care Plan Passes

Daschle Plan Allows Veterans to Receive Emergency Care at Non-VA Hospitals

I am pleased to report that my proposal to allow veterans to be reimbursed for emergency care they receive at non-Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) facilities is now the law of the land. Many South Dakota veterans have argued that they should not be penalized for receiving emergency medical care at non-VA facilities. I agree and am grateful that Congress has finally passed this important legislation.

The VA often refused to reimburse veterans for emergency care they received at non-VA facilities unless they were 100-percent service-connected disabled or if the treatment they received was for a service-connected disability. Many veterans were unable to meet these criteria because their emergencies usually resulted from heart attacks and strokes, which are rarely service-connected.

Veterans taken to non-VA facilities were often forced to pay for their emergency care out of their own pockets. This practice was financially devastating to those who once served our country and later had no health insurance.

My legislation authorizes the VA to reimburse veterans enrolled in the VA health care system for the cost of emergency care they receive in non-VA facilities when there is "a serious threat to the life or health of a veteran."

However, because of budget concerns raised by some of my colleagues, the final bill limits eligibility to veterans who have no other health insurance and who have received care at a VA facility in the two years prior to the emergency.

While more needs to be done, we have taken this important step in ensuring that veterans in South Dakota and across the country will receive the affordable emergency health care they deserve.

DASCHLE SUPPORTS BENEFITS FOR VETERANS

Congress approved the Veterans Millennium Health Care and Benefits Act in November. In addition to my emergency care proposal, this bill includes a number of provisions that will improve health care for veterans and provide them with more long-term care options.

For instance, the bill directs the VA to provide nursing home care to veterans with service-connected disabilities rated at 70 percent or higher and for those veterans who need nursing home care because of a service-connected condition. All veterans enrolled in the VA health care system will also be eligible to receive the noninstitutional long-term care they need, including home care and adult day care.

I am pleased to report that the bill gives the VA the authority to reduce the co-payment that veterans pay for outpatient care. Like many veterans, I strongly believe this co-payment -- which is currently more than \$45 -- is too expensive for veterans and particularly those who are seen for routine office visits.

The bill also waives co-payments for military retirees and requires the VA and the Department of Defense to develop an interagency agreement that would allow TRICARE to reimburse the VA for health care services provided to military retirees.

ACCESS TO EMERGENCY CARE

Tom Daschle Wants to Hear From You!

Contact Senator Daschle:



Senator Tom Daschle listens to concerns raised by constituents in the American Legion Hall in Dupree this summer. If you have a question, comment or problem you would like to Tom to know about, please contact him at one of the numbers below.

RAPID CITY
P.O. Box 8168
Rapid City, SD
57709
(605) 348-7551

ABERDEEN
P.O. Box 1536
Aberdeen, SD 57401
(605) 225-8823

SIOUX FALLS
P.O. Box 1274
Sioux Falls, SD 57101
(605) 334-9596

On the Internet:

<http://daschle.senate.gov>

Washington Office:

**U.S. Senator Tom Daschle
509 H.S.O.B Washington, DC 20510
1-800-424-9094**

Veterans Office Hours

Meet with Tom's Constituent Service Staff at the locations below:

HURON

Tuesday, March 21
7:00pm - 8:30 pm
American Legion
373 Wisconsin SW

YANKTON

Monday, April 3
8:00pm - 9:30pm
VFW Hall
209 Cedar

STURGIS

Wednesday, March 22
11:00am - 1:00pm
Ft. Meade VA Medical
Ctr. Building 145
113 Comanche Rd

WATERTOWN

Tuesday, April 4
7:00pm -- 9:00pm
VFW
808 Broadway

SISSETON

Tuesday, March 21
7:00pm - 9:00pm
VFW
116 Ash St. E

MARTIN

Tuesday, March 29
1:00pm - 3:00pm
Martin Veterans Center
105 E. Hwy 18